

Recommendations for Building Family Violence Workforce Capacity in Gippsland

Election Statement

October 2022



Gippsland
Family Violence
Alliance

www.gippslandfamilyviolencealliance.com.au

Key Recommendations



Family Violence Social Work Graduate Program

- Expand the program to include those who have completed equivalent degrees
- Provide consistent funding to agencies so that they can establish ongoing pathways into the sector
- Provide funding to agencies that include wage subsidies
- Provide dedicated targets for graduates that reflect their 75% caseload

International Recruitment

- Provide ongoing funding to agencies to allow them to recruit internationally
- Advocate for the removal of the IETS Language test for those who have completed an Australian Social Work Accredited University Course in Australia when applying for permanent residency



Relocating Practitioners from Metropolitan Areas

- Include Gippsland in the Regional Workforce Pilot.
- Complete the 10 Year Social Housing Plan in 2023.
- Provide subsidies to landlords to improve their rental homes, under the condition they head lease the homes to Community Service Agencies for the purpose of social housing or staff housing for a period of 5 years.
- Initiate the recommendations of the [Gippsland Homelessness Election Campaign](#)



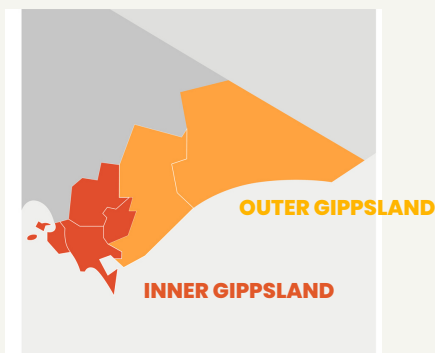
Gendered Impact on Local Recruitment

- Social Work and equivalent Placements paid a bursary equal to the pension to compensate for lost income while completing 1000 hours of placement
- Provide scholarships for 10,000 Social Work students over two years to complete their social work degree to meet industry demand
- Support universities to establish Communities of Practices to meet clinical supervision needs of students who are studying social work
- A greater recognition of current employment or previous placements when undertaking a Social Work and equivalent degrees to reduce the amount of time someone needs to work unpaid.



Background

Inner and Outer Gippsland DFFH areas make up the largest DFFH geographical area in Victoria, comprising of six local government areas: Latrobe City, Wellington, East Gippsland, South Gippsland, Baw Baw and Bass Coast.



The Gippsland Family Violence Alliance (GFVA) is Gippsland's Regional Integration Committee comprising of 36 Organisations who work to respond to those who are experiencing family violence or using violence in the home. Over the past three years, we have been experiencing growth in our sector, and it's been increasingly difficult to fill roles, particularly with people who are from the Gippsland region.

Gippsland has a growing reliance on its health and community support workforce, with a report estimating that it will become Gippsland's largest employer and we will need an additional 4000 staff by 2036[1]. However, this report was published pre-pandemic and it is expected that the demand has been expedited because of COVID-19, early retirements and exits from the health & community sectors.

Gippsland has a history which has been built around a highly gendered workforce, including fisheries, power stations, paper mills and farming. This has created an environment where gender inequality has been perpetuated and normalised, resulting in some of the highest rates of family violence in the state per 100,000 population. Between June 2021 and July 2022, East Gippsland was 2nd, Latrobe 3rd and Wellington was 5th out of all 79 Local Government Areas in the state for family violence[2].

We expect to see a shift in our economy in Gippsland as the power company AGL has announced that Loy Yang A Power Station will close 10 years earlier than planned, which will have ripple effects throughout the community and ultimately onto our community service agencies who provide support.

[1] Swinburne University, Gippsland's Future Health and Community Services Workforce

[2] Crime Statistics Agency

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Issue

In July 2021, Recommendation 209 came into effect for the Family Violence workforce, which required those recruited from this date to hold a Social Work or equivalent degree. **Members of the Gippsland Family Violence Alliance are in support of this recommendation being implemented.**

“ We see this as a recognition of the complexity and risk that our practitioners hold and a way to ensure that our majority woman-identifying workforce are paid adequately for their work.

We consider the professionalisation of the sector as recognition of the complexity and risk that our practitioners hold and a way to ensure that the majority of a woman-identifying workforce are remunerated adequately for their work. However, we are experiencing unique challenges aligning to these recommendations as we do not have a university in Gippsland that offers the Bachelor of Social Work nor the Masters of Social Work (qualifying) locally nor do we have enough demand from our community to pursue careers in this sector. This means we are reliant on recruiting from out of the Gippsland area.

We do not conceptualise the family violence workforce as being uniquely separate from the rest of the community services workforce. The recent move to professionalise family violence roles have made these positions attractive to practitioners from family services, justice and child protection etc, which often means we're recruiting from those sectors, only to have a limited workforce to refer to, or consult with when we need.

The service sector in Gippsland is interconnected and practitioners will rarely stay in one stream of specialisation for their whole career and will move to roles that suit their interest, lifestyle, career goals and monetary ambitions. We're conscious of the impact of recruitment of experienced practitioners from surrounding sectors which is resulting in newer practitioners/graduates not having support, mentorship nor learning opportunities from experienced practitioners.

We understand that work is being done within the new Centre of Workforce Excellence to address some of these issues, however we also feel that a place-based approach is necessary to overcome barriers that may not have been considered for regional/remote communities.

Social Work Graduate Program

Gippsland Agencies have been a large supporter of the Family Violence Social Work Program. In the Regional and Rural Program, Gippsland agencies applied for the largest number of positions in the state, expressing interest in 18 positions.

We were able to fill 14 of these positions, all of those came from out-of-area with and all applicants were international graduates. In the *Combined Program*, Gippsland agencies expressed interest in five positions and were only able to fill one position.

The existing program, as it is currently designed, does not replicate a graduate program similar to what a graduate would experience in the Public Service, Teaching or Medical Sectors. The roles were not explicitly funded and as such, came out of existing vacancies, so agencies are required to continue to meet the same targets. Graduates could only hold a 75% case load, which has put pressure on the existing workforce to meet the agencies targets by taking on a higher client-load, which was not an intended outcome of the program.

Graduates also do not get the opportunity to rotate between roles as they would if the program was specifically designed, which is what Graduate applicants in the Public Service and Medical Sector experience.

The current program is designed to fill workforce gaps, instead of create genuine pathways into the sector that allow them to experience roles that suit their capabilities and interests. The EOI process does not create consistency for the agencies to allow them to establish permanent programs to support the graduates, nor for the universities so that they can direct applicants into the program. Finally, it would be ideal if the program was structured so that we could recruit final year students so that we can compete with the hospital and Public Service Graduate Programs, who typically recruit applicants in Feb-April in the last year of their course.

We continue to be a large supporter of this program, however, there are some

improvements that can be considered if this was to be a permanent pathway into the sector.

Recommendations

1. The Graduate Program is expanded beyond Social Work to include Bachelor of Community and Human Services or any other degree deemed equivalent in accordance with Recommendation 209. This creates an equity in experience for all graduates who are entering the sector and allows areas such as Gippsland who do not have a University with a Social Work or Masters of Social Work (qualifying) to recruit local applicants.

In the long term, we recommend :

1. That a permanent annual intake of graduate positions be allocated to agencies to enable them to develop internal programs and recruitment strategies. Large state based organisations may be able to establish this pathway through their centralised Learning and Development Departments, however, smaller organisations especially Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations will only be able to do this if it's explicitly funded.
2. That agencies are allocated additional program funding for the design and implementation of these Graduate Programs, including for some graduate wage subsidies.
3. That agencies funded targets be reconsidered to ensure the additional graduate roles are not shifting the burden of carrying the existing targets to the longer term staff. Graduate roles should come with their own unique targets that reflect the 75% caseload.

International Recruitment

GFVA is aware that moving forward as a nation Australia is going to become more reliant on migrant workers. Modelling by Committee for Economic Development Australia (CEDA) suggests that by 2055 there will be just 2.7 working people in Australia for every dependant person^[1] and that skilled migrant workers are going to be critical to our worker shortages particularly in care-giving industries which are less likely to be able to fill the gaps with technological advancements. **GFVA also welcomes this as it offers a chance to diversify our workforce and allows for the opportunity for the workforce to be representative of the clients they are serving.**

“ We would also like to highlight the gendered impact on our workforce, who predominately identify as women, when they are on short-term contracts and are unable to have certainty in rental/mortgage applications which places them and their families at high risk of homelessness/housing insecurity/financial insecurity.

Gippsland agencies are keen to look to international recruitment to fill some of our workforce gaps. With the recent release in the *MARAM User of Violence Tools and Practice Guides* and the upcoming release of the *MARAM Adolescents who Use Violence Tools and Practice Guides*, this may be an opportunity to recruit talent from nations who have done substantial work in these areas such as the UK, Canada and areas of the US.

However, one of the biggest barriers agencies are experiencing in recruiting internationally, is that to go through the process of recruitment through a Visa Subclass 482 is approximately 6 months. Some of the funding agencies are currently receive is not ongoing, therefore they are not in a position to go through a 6 month recruitment process.

It's commonly noted by Family Safety Victoria that the reason that funding isn't ongoing is because programs are in a trial period, and while we do support the need for programs to be funded based on evidence and research, we would like to challenge how this is undertaken and whether it requires the consistent use of short term funding to develop an evidence base.

We would also like to highlight the gendered impact on our workforce, who predominately identify as women, when they are on short-term contracts and are unable to have certainty in rental/mortgage applications which places them and their families at high risk of homelessness/housing insecurity/financial insecurity.

Funding options that allow for evidence to be developed, but doesn't require short term funding, could include:

[1] CEDA, Effects of Temporary Migration: Shaping Australia's Society and Economy

1. A more thorough examination of evidence from international programs. Currently as a sector we're often recreating programs based on international evidence, because there is never the funding to purchase the evidence based programs, and programs such as Caring Dad's, which has an evidence base both within Australia and internationally and are not receiving the funding it deserves.
2. Funding guarantees to agencies who do accept trials of programs to ensure they are included in the final roll out of programs regardless of what the final product outcome is.

Another issue identified with international recruitment is that many international students come to Australia to study Social Work, but face extreme barriers when trying to gain a permanent visa.

Gippsland agencies have taken these students for their placements, and hire them after they have graduated. These new Graduates are skilled migrants and are on a temporary skilled migration visa, under the category of health and social assistance. Currently there are only 7,680^[2] workers Australia wide who are in Australia under the category of health and social assistance, with the majority of them being aged care practitioners and nurses.

For the family violence sector, these practitioners, offer a wealth of knowledge, particularly those who work in the refuge and case management roles, where they can support migrant women who experience family violence and who are experiencing a complex visa processing issues.

However, these Practitioners themselves experience complexity when they attempt to extend their own visas and gain permanent residency. To gain permanent residency as a Social Worker, applicants who have Australian degree's need to pass the International English Language Test System (IELTS) which costs \$395, and requires a high level of English proficiency, before the applicant can apply for Australia Association of Social Workers (AASW) membership, to be eligible for one of the three visa's where Social Work is listed under the Skilled Occupation List. It's worth noting that at this point these applicants have already passed a Social Work degree, which has been accredited by the AASW as meeting Australian

Standards, to place another test upon them is not only burdensome, but also holds them to a higher standard than we hold Australian's who want to register with AASW.

Due to the complexity of the IELTS, many are not opting to apply for permanent residency as Social Workers, and instead as Welfare Worker's and registering with the Australian Community Workers Association, which requires a different English test. Some are even opting to move to New Zealand where the language test is not as stringent.

There is an inconsistency here, where the Victorian Family Violence Sector is asking for Social Workers, but the visa application process is favouring migrants only from nations that speak English as a first language, and not recognising Australian trained social workers. The entire process becomes expensive for some of these workers who may start on a SCHADS 5.2 and who already experience additional costs such as health insurance, setting up a home and paying outright for their course.

These applicants hold an Australian degree, there shouldn't be the additional language requirements to gain permanent residency an Australian degree and employment in the sector should be sufficient to meet visa requirements.

Recommendations

1. Provide ongoing funding to agencies to allow them to recruit internationally.
2. Advocate for the removal of the IETS Language test for those who have completed an Australian Social Work Accredited University Course in Australia when applying for permanent residency.

^[2] CEDA, Australia's labour market: job's skills and migration

Meet Udeshika

Udesh was a counsellor in Sri Lanka to 600 women, before undertaking the Masters of Social Work at Federation University in Berwick in 2018–2020. Udesh immediately became interested in the family violence sector, as many of the stories she heard as a counsellor included family violence and she felt this is where she could make the biggest impact. Both of her Social Work Degree placements were in the family violence sector one at a specialist service and one in a strategic role.

Settlement for Udesh and her partner was difficult, as there wasn't a lot of support around understanding the legal rules of Australian employment, nor how to navigate things such as traffic laws, setting up bank accounts etc. Most was learned through setting up a community with fellow migrants once in Australia.

COVID regulations also made it especially difficult, as those on student visa's were not able to leave the country and when Udesh's father passed away, she was not able to leave. It was May 2021 when she was finally able to return to Sri Lanka to make it back to perform the funeral rituals which were significantly delayed.

After she completed her course, Udesh applied for only 15 jobs before she was employed by Quantum Support Services, as a Family Violence Specialist in the Rural and Regional Social Work Program. She's had friends who applied for over 100 jobs, so she felt lucky that it only took her 1 month before securing this role. Udesh spent the first 2 months travelling to work in Morwell via the train, which was a 3 hours one way trip, before her and her husband were able to secure housing in Traralgon.

Securing housing in Gippsland wasn't easy, some real estate agents had vacancies listed on their websites but denied there were vacancies when she and her partner presented for inspections. Over the past 18 months Udesh and her partner have built a community both of other migrants from Sri Lanka and of co-workers and they have decided to stay in Australia, as there isn't such an established system for social workers in Sri Lanka.

The application process hasn't been easy. Udesh first tried to apply for the 190 permanent visa as a social worker, which requires a point system, she had a degree, was between 25–32 years old and completed the IELTS exam three times, each time getting a 6.5, instead of the desired 7 mark. The test was \$375 each time. Udesh has a friend who sat the test 19 times before passing. To move the process along, Udesh applied as a Welfare Worker instead, she has passed and recently received a final invitation to apply for permanent residency. She is going to complete the paperwork next week.

Udesh has finished the social work graduate program and has the career ambition to become a senior case manager or an Advanced Practice Lead in the next few years, but also to build a family with her husband.

Udesh's co-workers speak of her amazing knowledge and gentle manner with clients, and her tenacity in her visa process, never complaining even when her travel was long and difficult. She is a welcomed member of the team and community.



Udeshika
Family Violence Specialist
Quantum Support Services
Gippsland



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Relocating Practitioners from Metropolitan Areas

Given that Federation University in Gippsland doesn't have a local Social Work program, we're currently recruiting practitioners from out of area. One of the major barriers to this is the lack of housing both in private rental market and houses to purchase in Gippsland.

This is a complex issue that has been compounded by the 2019/2020 bushfires in East Gippsland, the COVID-19 pandemic and people leaving metropolitan areas for a new lifestyle and the shortages in building supplies.

We have had practitioners and even CEO's sleeping on the couches of friends, travelling 2+ hours to work each day for 6 months and practitioners turning down job opportunities when they have been unable to secure housing. This is compounded by rentals in regional Victoria rising by 8.9%^[3] in the past year, which is one of the largest increases on record for any regional area in Victoria, and any practitioner we bring to the area may be displacing clients who are also in need of housing.

While we acknowledge that this is not an issue any one initiative can solve. We would like Gippsland to be considered for inclusion in the *Regional Workforce Pilot*, which was rolled out in South Coast, Alpine, Robinvale and the Grampians. While we recognise these were 12month trials, the infrastructure of these projects was designed to future plan for the regions. Without any future planning for Gippsland, we will not be in a position to house our growing workforce. Our councils are in need of the support to plan for our future workforce growth, through creative initiatives, and this is an opportunity for creative problem solving and planning.

The Big Build has been a fantastic initiative for Victoria and the GFVA welcomed the investment in both social housing and housing specifically for victim/survivors. However, without a 10 year Social Housing Strategy, we're not going to see a sustained outcome for our clients. This has a flow

on effect on our communities, to the housing on the private rental market that our practitioners can access and the quality/price of housing that is available to purchase. We encourage the 10 Year Strategy to be a priority of any new Government.

According to the 2021 Census, 10% of all housing is going unused, or were thought to be AirBNB's or holiday houses^[4]. This is greatly affecting the ability of agencies to access private rentals, both for staff accommodation and for client.

The Victorian Government has the target of reducing emissions by 50% by 2030 so there is an opportunity to address both issues at once. A policy solution would be to offer free energy upgrades (higher than what is currently available on the subsidies) for solar, batteries, double glazed windows, unfloor insulation etc to existing homes that are unoccupied/being used as AirBNB/Holiday homes, with the stipulation that they must be available for head lease to community services organisations for a 5 year period. Agreements would need to include a caveat on the house for the costs of the upgrades if the home was sold in that time period.

Recommendation

1. Include Gippsland in the Regional Workforce Pilot.
2. Complete the 10 Year Social Housing a Plan in 2023.
3. Provide subsidies to landlords to improve their rental homes, under the condition they head lease the homes to Community Service Agencies for the purpose of social housing or staff housing for a period of 5 years.
4. Initiate the recommendations of the [Gippsland Homelessness Election Campaign](#)

[3] DFFH Rental Report.

[4] Lohberger, L 2022, 'One million homes were unoccupied on census night. How that could help people struggling to find housing

Gendered Impact on Local Recruitment

Rurality is recognised within the Royal Commission to Family Violence as increasing risk, however it's commonly only recognised as a risk factor for those who are experiencing violence. The impact of regional and rural living is poorly understood on the workforce and on those who are hoping to become part of the family violence workforce. A report noted that in 2018, two-thirds of social workers in Victoria lived in metropolitan areas[5].



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The majority of our workforce comprises of those who identify as women. In 2020, 86% of Social Work students identified as women and were the average age of 29.3 years[6], meaning they are mature aged students who are more likely to hold caring responsibilities towards children and older people. Social Workers are committed to serving oppressed groups and delivering social and economic justice, however many also experience disadvantage.

A study undertaken in 2017 compared the access rates to higher education among individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds from 2007 to 2013 by the Department of Education and Training in Australia. The data showed the number of entry-level students aged over 25 years did not increase, while students below 25 years have steadily increased during the period[7]. Between 14-17% of Gippsland residents live in poverty, of living in poverty, 52-54% are women [8]. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are even more impacted by both caring responsibilities and lower incomes.

The ability to attract Gippsland residents to a Social Work degree is directly impacted by their ability to undertake a degree that has substantial placement hours and which isn't provided locally. Federation University offers the Masters in Social Work (qualifying), however only through the Berwick and Ballarat Campus's.

Evidence from the medical field indicates that those who are from rural locations and have substantial rural placements during their degrees are much more likely than their metropolitan peers to remain in a rural and regional area eight years after the completion of their course[9].

[5] Department of Health and Human Services, Victorian Health Workforce Research Program: Social Work Workforce Report

[6] Save Social Work Australia

[7] Social Work Student Hardship: A Review of the Literature

[8] VCOSS, Every Suburb, Every Town: Poverty in Victoria

[9] Sydney University, Influence of rural clinical school experience and rural origin on practicing in rural communities five and eight years after graduation.

If we want to attract Gippsland residents to the sector, who are more likely to remain in Gippsland, we need to address the barriers they experience when studying for their course. Due to the high rates of family violence in Gippsland, Gippsland residences are more likely to have lived experience of family violence.

Many of our practitioners hold Diploma's in Communities Services and have undertaken significant placements, many of them are also currently working in the community sector, in the Family Violence, Homelessness, Family Services, Mental Health or Alcohol and Drug fields. However, there is no avenue for their current work or previous placement to be recognised towards their Social Work placement hours, even though if they were doing the Social Work degree, these would be considered valid placements. Some universities may give them RPL for a year off their course, but the placement hours usually remain.

The AASW is also advocating that placements be paid at the rate of the pension^[10]. Currently those who are eligible may be receiving AuStudy, which is set \$530.40 for a single person or \$679.00 for someone with dependents per fortnight. With the average rent in rural Victoria being \$395^[11] per week, it is really impossible for someone to survive on AuStudy without working, however it is also impossible to work while on placement which is 5 days a week for 500 hours x 2. If placements were paid at \$936 per fortnight which is the pension rate, it would significantly assist students. There is also documented research into the mental health stress that placements have on students, which include the increase likelihood of substance use, strained relationships with family and the impacts on their physical health ^[12].

Alternatively, the Victorian Government has recently announced they will pay for the degrees of 10,000 nurses, which is extremely welcome in an overstretched system that needs 123,000 nurses by 2030^[13].

We are recommending that the Victorian Government make a similar investment into Social Workers, both Bachelor and Masters (qualifying), to allow them to upskill into the sector and enter with no HECS debt. Another welcome strategy would be to support students to undertake placements in the form of a bursary, particularly to rural/regional students it would do a lot to overcome the systemic barriers our local student's experience.

Supporting more students to enter the sector, will also mean that there will need to be support for both agencies and existing social workers in private practice to support these students through their placements and provide them with the necessary clinical supervision.

We would like the universities to be supported to establish Communities of Practices to cover the needs of the influx of students that would come into the sector if free university, or a bursary to cover placements was offered.

Recommendations

1. Social Work and equivalent Placements paid a bursary equal to the pension to compensate for lost income while completing 1000 hours of placement.
2. Provide scholarships for 10,000 Social Work students over two years to complete their social work degree to meet industry demand .
3. Support universities to establish Communities of Practices to meet clinical supervision needs of students who are studying social work.
4. A greater recognition of current employment or previous placements when undertaking a Social Work and equivalent degrees to reduce the amount of time someone needs to work unpaid.

^[10] AASW Budget Paper

^[11] DFFH Rent Report

^[12] Hodge, Oke, McIntyre, Turner, 2021, Lengthy unpaid placements in social work, exploring the impacts on student wellbeing, Social Work Education, 40:6, 787-802, DOI: 10.1080/02615479.2020.1736542

^[13] CEDA, Effects on Temporary Migration: Shaping Australia's Society and Economy



Tania
Family Violence Specialist
Quantum Support Services
Gippsland

“Tania is motivated to work in a sector where ‘women are working together to support women’

Meet Tania

Tania worked in retail management for many years, as a single mother, the hours suited her schedule as they allowed her to take the children to work.

She was always interested in working in the community services, but never really had the opportunity to pursue it until after she experienced family violence from an abusive partner and was forced to move back in with her mother for a period of time.

When she met her current husband, and moved to Koo Wee Rup he encouraged her to pursue study, and she started studying the Diploma of Community and Welfare Services during her lunch breaks at work. She completed her placements during her days off and annual leave.

After completing her course, it took her two years of applying for work to secure work in the family violence sector. In that time, no one told her of Recommendation 209, about the minimum qualifications, nor any pathways options into the sector. The feedback she received was that she *‘didn’t have enough experience’*.

Eventually she found employment in the family violence sector through Quantum Support Services as a Specialist Family Violence Practitioner, a sector she is passionate about after her own childhood experiences being in refuge with her mother.

Tania is motivated to work in a sector where *“women are working together to support women”* and to meet the requirements of Rec 209 she has begun studying the Bachelor of Community Services through Federation University in Gippsland.

Tania has noted that there were some really arbitrary requirements for her to begin studying, such as a math test, before she started her diploma, because she didn’t have her VCE, when maths wasn’t even relevant to the course. She notes that these things can be removed and made more relevant to the learning of the course.

Tania really enjoys fast paced environments and would like to work in the Orange Door or in Case Management one day. Tania’s hope is that it becomes simpler for women like her to enter the sector, without needing to sacrifice time earning superannuation, or time out of employment to do lengthy placements, Tania advocates that, *“learning can be done through the workplace”*.

We recognise that the recommendations placed forward in this report, require a coordinated response at a local, state and federal level. However, our hope is to demonstrate that while these issues are complex, they do have **real solutions** and if we work together our regional and remote workforce challenges can be significantly solved with a coordinated response.

Kate Graham

Chair of the Gippsland Family Violence Alliance
CEO of Gippsland Women's Health

Kim Adams

Principal Strategic Advisor for Family Violence
Gippsland Family Violence Alliance

The Gippsland Family Violence Alliance acknowledges the traditional custodians of Gippsland the Gunai/Kurnai and Bunerong nations. We pay our respect to Elders past and present and recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a sovereign people who have never ceded their sovereignty of this land. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's human right to self-determination. We are committed to working in solidarity and partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to improve women's, children's and men's health, safety and wellbeing.



We welcome lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, gender diverse, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) into our services and into the mission of the Gippsland Family Violence Alliance.

We pledge to provide inclusive and non-discriminatory representation of LGBTIQ people experiencing or using violence in the home.

